



Orchid Horticulture
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Final Report

In appreciation for being a recipient of a Jack Kimmel Grant 2022



Jack Kimmel Grant Application - Final Report

Respectfully submitted by : Patricia Hanbidge – Lead Horticulturist, Orchid Horticulture

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The Canadian TREE Fund award received through the Jack Kimmel grant has been instrumental in the planned expansion of the James Smith Cree Nation Orchard. This project, led by Patricia Hanbidge, is working toward the goal of reasserting Indigenous food sovereignty, food security and good health.

Hanbidge is the Lead Horticulturist with the non-profit Orchid Horticulture (OH), and has spent a lifetime sharing knowledge and training others to work in the field of horticulture. Since 2018, OH has been working with the James Smith Cree Nation (JSCN) to establish an orchard and reassert indigenous food sovereignty and food security.

The goal is to continue the expansion of this orchard until it benefits the entire population of JSCN - the funding received from the Canadian TREE Fund Award through the Jack Kimmel grant has accomplished substantial growth towards this goal. Alike to the natural landscape, the trees are the integral centre to the orchard's success.



Traditional food systems that were utilized in the past were built on respect for nature and a deep historical and spiritual relationship to food and the land. In modern times, this relationship has weakened with growing dependence on unhealthy, processed foods, and a distancing from the traditional ties to Mother Earth. As a result, tragically high food insecurity and spiking rates of diabetes, obesity and kidney disease have occurred in the community.

We are seeing the community beginning to work together to grow, harvest and store foods to be enjoyed year round. The interaction and symbiotic relationship with the land, most especially the trees, that was a part of everyday life is slowly reemerging.

OH is working with JSCN to provide the skills and knowledge needed to return to the land in more traditional ways, by revisiting the importance of convening with nature to build stronger, healthier communities. This multi-faceted project has maintained tree planting and establishment as the major focus to date as trees are the backbone of this orchard. The elders have been present to bless each planting session and we are seeing the community come together, to work and learn about plants. Part of this is learning is sharing how to keep the soil that has been provided by Mother Earth healthy to support optimal growth of the trees. Thus, education and outreach have also been a key component throughout this project and we have community wide involvement of all ages. People are becoming more learned in traditional ways that have not been prioritized for some time. The orchard project is an essential teaching tool that is utilized in the community as a food system. As each year passes, we will continue to grow the orchard and plant more trees to ensure bountiful and varied harvests.



The work process we go through each season begins in the spring as the orchard comes back to life. Community members learn how to work in the orchard, watering, weeding and completing other general care of the trees. Work bees for the larger construction projects happen intermittently, and are attended by governing officials, Elders, Chiefs and youth from the school. Many social activities and community events are also part of the events throughout the growing season. Harvest is an extra special time, as the fruits of the community labours are shared and processed for enjoyment throughout winter. Workshops are held to help share knowledge and ensure that proper storage of produce and fruit is possible.

As we near Year 5 of this project, we are confident that it is flourishing from the aspect of tree survival and production status, and we are seeing greater growth each season. Our expansion strategy towards planting mature trees has been a success, giving shade and storing carbon, in addition to the provided harvests in the short-term. We have sourced these trees through the arboriculture industry, and got a helpful jump on supply shortages by ordering earlier. To date, we have planted apples (both standard and trees grafted onto dwarf rootstock), plums, pears, cherries, Saskatoon's, haskaps, raspberries, currants, and rhubarb.



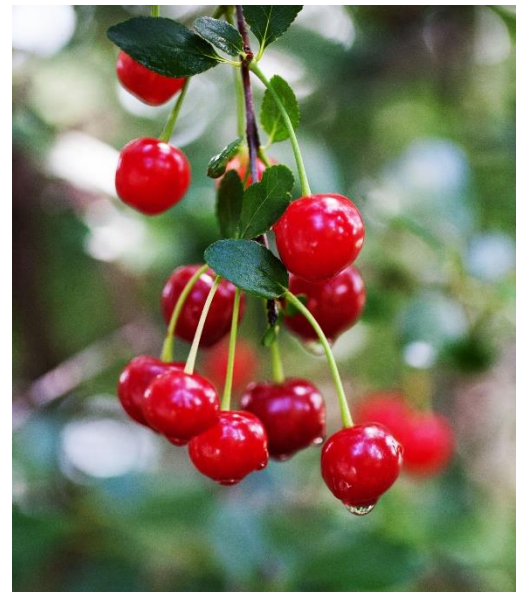
Since lots of the necessary infrastructure had been built in previous seasons, this season specifically we were able to utilize the Canadian TREE Fund award received through the Jack Kimmel grant funds to directly “grow” the orchard with more extensive tree planting and increased education initiatives, amplifying the positive effects on the community.

Ten more mature apple trees and a few hundred two-year-old asparagus crowns were planted this season. Ample care was also given to all established fruit trees and shrubs. The asparagus was new this year in an attempt to ensure there is harvestable

fruit and vegetables consistently from early spring through to late autumn. The orchard now contains enough apple trees to supply the entire community with fresh apples, plus lots of fruit to process in the cooking and canning classes that are given on JSCN.

Other notable initiatives that arose from this season included educational sessions in the school for Grade 4/5/6 students as well as the youth group. These sessions focused on building the skills and knowledge of understanding what plants need to thrive and be productive.

A total of 90 planting projects for Mother’s Day gifts were completed by Grades 4, 5 and 6 students with heritage tomatoes supplied by OH. The students transplanted the tomatoes into decorative pots along with the information that shared how to care for the plants from seeding, transplanting, and then into the garden. As these plants are heirloom plants information on how to collect seeds was also shared.



This exercise built additional interest in the orchard project and we saw a wonderful turnout of students and their family members on planting day as well as at additional events through the season.

The youth group was given a similar presentation, but the teaching went into more depth about the care and nurturing of plants. Time was spent in the garden, learning more about soils, control of weeds and learning what plants need to thrive. The Youth Group supplies produce to the elders in the community that is personally delivered at harvest time allowing an opportunity for the sharing of stories. Bringing back that bond between people and plants is a key component of each learning event.

Tomatoes were also supplied to the youth group and the community members themselves. After the above noted presentations, the community was also addressed on plant care and specifically about the care and culture of heritage tomatoes. Some of this presentation was aired on the local Facebook group. Community members were supplied with seed for their personal garden spots and much discussion ensued on challenges and triumphs experienced in the garden.



The Canadian TREE Fund award received through the Jack Kimmel grant allowed this project to expand more quickly this season than has been previously possible. This grant also helped us to make a more concerted effort to involve the community members within the school setting. We are seeing the community develop a resurgence of interest in rebuilding the connections to the land and to traditional practices around growing, gathering and preserving food.

The JSCN is demonstrating that they are self-directed and well-resourced within the community, with policies and systems in place that focus on community growth and in this case food sovereignty. The people are relearning that the trees are very much like the people. The trees stand tall and sturdy with strong roots, good nourishment and appropriate care. Successful projects such as this one, help to fuel the arboriculture industry by increasing the understanding and importance of trees for both ornamental and production values. Within the JSCN, we are providing short and long-term solutions to food sovereignty, and building a more sustainable community for future generations.



This project continues to be a true partnership between a community and a nonprofit organization, supported by countless other contributors. Both the JSCN and OH are very supportive of this project, and the in-kind support they provide has been essential to project success and ensuring that the generosity from funders such as the Canadian TREE Fund award received through the Jack Kimmel grant goes as far as possible in contributing to growth.

From within the JSCN, there are a number of influential people who have worked hard to build success. Mike Marion, a resident of JSCN and the Health Director, has been the driving force of this project. He has been involved since the project's inception and personally attends all planting events, spends countless hours doing "tree work" within the orchard to ensure all facets of care are met, while advocating for the project with the community and government organizations. Chief Calvin Sanderson has been involved with every event at the orchard, and is key to ensuring high level support for this project.



He brings his grandchildren and personally teaches them how to plant to ensure the legacy of transferring knowledge continues, and is also responsible for ensuring Elder involvement in this project. Kelsey Mawaro is a Dietician and Certified Diabetes Educator with the Health Centre, and lives close to the JSCN



community. She facilitates this project as a true project manager. All of these contributors have worked in collaboration with OH's lead horticulturist Patricia Hanbidge and Director of Operations Heather Richardson to make this project a success. There are countless other contributing community members, with each planting bee involving 100+ people. This is of the greatest importance as it is them that will see this project become a legacy and a way of the future for this community.

There has been and continues to be extensive promotion of this project throughout JSCN and the wider community and governing bodies, to grow awareness. Orchard Horticulture also utilizes a multitude of communication channels to ensure that projects like JSCN Orchard are a known entity in the larger world. Patricia Hanbidge is the gardening expert on CBC BlueSky and continues to bring news to the listening audience on what is happening with JSCN Orchard and other projects that OH is involved in. Hanbidge also writes a garden column 52 weeks a year that brings support and knowledge through the weekly newspapers throughout Canada.



Overall, success of this project is measured by involvement of the community members, a marker that continues to consistently grow each year. Outcomes such as the volume of harvest are also considered a success factor, as is the ever-increasing circle of support. As of this year, we are also able to analyze the amount of dollars received through new, outside funding sources such as these grant funds.



The recent tragedies that occurred in this community are devastating. Thankfully, we have the orchard project which has provided another healing site. It is planned to do some Horticulture Therapy sessions to also aid in the healing process of this community.

Although it is only September, the harvest has been completed. The work for OH on site is also now complete. The \$6000 granted to us helped to achieve a larger part of our goals and has given us hope for additional support outside of our previous funding avenues. Dollars were used directly for trees and materials to ensure that planting and establishment goals were reached for this year. The shortfall in our budget was supplemented internally by both JSCN and OH, both with real dollars and in kind contributions to ensure more involvement of the community and to expand the education and outreach. It is recognized by both JSCN and OH that the education and outreach is essential for long term success and plan to expand that as a priority in the next couple of years.

We are happy to experience the many fruits of our labours and now are looking forward to future seasons and the new projects each year brings. Expanding the orchard land area and building a dugout adjacent to the growing area are planned, as well as continuing to expand the education and outreach.

The JSCN and OH thank you greatly for your contributions, and would welcome any conversations about available support in future!

